



Radiohead: Very Very funny

# FM AND

● **Neurotic, paranoid, alienated, personally inadequate (sound familiar?) – RADIOHEAD's THOM YORKE could well be the new British lyricist to claim the King Of Glum's songwriting crown, swears psychoanalyst JOHN HARRIS. Head shots: A J BARRATT**

**T**here are four things currently lying next to my stereo: PJ

Harvey's 'Dry' album, Suede's 'Metal Mickey', an advance cassette of the soon-come Kingmaker single, and a copy of Radiohead's new EP.

Superficially, they have little in common, but they're all refreshing evidence of the welcome return of the neurotic, articulate lyricist.

The neurotic, articulate British lyricist, that is. While the Americans have continued to export cathartic, confessional product from the likes of Black Francis, Kristin Hersh, Kurt Cobain and Buffalo Tom's Bill Janovitz, bands on this side of the Atlantic have seemed to delight in their complete lack of anything to say. Maybe it was the fear of going anywhere near the angst-ridden territory so comprehensively covered by The Smiths, maybe it was the fact that being stoned out of your mind was suddenly fashionable again – but neither the

baggy bunch nor the floppy-fringed waifs who enjoyed the post-Madchester plaudits came anywhere near the kind of emotional rush peddled by Morrissey's men. The indie-rock of the late '80s and early '90s said nothing to you about your life.

Thankfully, we've now got Brett, Polly and Loz (and Nicky and Richey too, I guess, though what the hell something like "we blur into images of state coercion" means is anyone's guess). The new breed of messed-up young things deal with the emotional extremities of everyday existence. They sing about things that are more important than "slimy bog-eyed mong worms" (top one, Shaun), or "catching the breeze" (you know who you are, Tarquin). And their personal therapy group can now be swelled by the addition of Thom Yorke, the wordsmith and frontman of Radiohead.

Thom is about five foot four. He swears a lot. He went to Exeter University and he lives in Oxford, a place whose strange, cliché culture lies at the root of a lot of his songs. He's sitting next to me in a late night eatery in Manchester talking into a tape recorder because he and his band have just released a song called

'Creep' that's threatening to be one of the highlights of this year.

'**CREEP**' HAS been an NME office favourite for weeks. Musically, it's somewhat redolent of the left-field rock of the Boston set (it was produced by Slade and Kolderie, the team behind records by Buffalo Tom and Throwing Muses). As far as its lyrics are concerned, 'Creep' is a dark, desperate trawl through unrequited obsession, heavy on self-loathing and personal inadequacy, not an easy song to listen to, but one whose disquieting subject matter makes it nothing short of stunning.

It begins with Thom gazing at the object of his fixation, flattering her with couplets like, "You're just like an angel/ Your skin makes me cry." Then, after a huge, spluttering 'KERRUNCH' has shattered the lovelorn calm (more of that later), the song lifts into a heart-breaking "I'm a creep/I'm a weirdo/ I wish I was speciol/ So f—ing speciol..."

Not surprisingly, Thom's slightly guarded about the circumstances in which 'Creep' took shape.

"When I wrote it," he remembers, staring at the floor like a child admitting to shoplifting, "I was in the middle of a really, really serious obsession that got completely out of hand. It lasted about eight months. And it was unsuccessful, which made it even worse. She knows who she is."

The cause of much of Thom's misery, it transpires, was the feeling – familiar to many victims

# BLINDING

of *Fatal Attraction Syndrome* — that he just wasn't good enough for the person concerned. Hence the frenzied self-hatred that explodes every time he spits out "I'm a creep".

"It was all sad paranoia, completely in my own head," he continues, "but I really thought I had to be somebody different. And I still want to be that person; I want to be happy; I want to look good; I want to command the situation I'm in. But that'll never happen."

At the heart of almost all of Thom's lyrics is a sense of alienation from his surroundings, whether it's expressed in "Creep's" whispered final line, "I don't belong

here", or the first words of the last single "Prove Yourself", "I can't afford to breathe in this town".

They're sentiments that come from falling between the two factions that all but dominate life in Oxford's social centre: the yuppiefied, well-heeled types who hang around in the bars and bistros of the city's bohemian quarter, and the massive student population. Thom hasn't a kind word for either of them.

"The whole cultural situation in Oxford is such that you have a certain degree of power or influence or money to be admitted to any social sphere," he fumes. "Prove Yourself" was about the feeling of rejection I got

from living in Oxford. That's how I felt all the time; this constant feeling that no-one wanted me to be there, no-one gave a f— about me.

"In Oxford, if you haven't got much money, you're nothing. It's like Florence in Italy — one of those places where if you have money, it's a wonderful place to be, and if you don't, it's f—ing terrible. For a long time I f—ing hated the place. And then I got some cash."

He grins briefly, fiddling with his food, before he launches a verbal attack on Oxford's much-maligned university students.

"What really winds me up is the fact that the student population

doesn't involve itself with Oxford at all. They just cut themselves off, living behind huge walls and barbed wire, whereas to my mind they should feel a certain responsibility to the place. And then they wonder why they get beaten up while walking down the street at one in the morning.

"It all gives me the feeling that I'm in completely the wrong place. It's crawling with pretentious wankers."

So are you going to move out? "No. That's the weird thing. Although I hate a lot of people there, that's where all my friends are. And I really like a lot of aspects of the place. Paradoxical, I know, but it's true."

**ANALYSIS OVER,** we return to the subject of "Creep". If their press officer is to be believed, the whole majestic mess was recorded in one take.

**"I want to be happy; I want to look good; I want to command the situation I'm in. But that'll never happen."**

— Thom



*Out come the creeps*

"That's true," enthuses drummer Phil Selway. "We didn't even know it was being taped — we were just warming up for another track by playing the song. The reason it sounds so powerful is because it's completely self-conscious. We were overwhelmed by how good it sounded."

Talk then centres on the aforementioned "KERRUNCH" sound, which shockingly signals "Creep's" transition from weary verse to furious chorus. It sounds like a thunderclap being forced through a fuzz pedal. Or something.

"That," explains guitarist Ed O'Brien, "is the sound of Johnny (second) Head guitarist, in bed with flu) crying to f— the song up. He really didn't like it the first time we played it, so he tried spoiling it. And it made the song." And what of the fact that the song's key line, "You're so f—ing special," has been altered on every copy of the record destined for the radio?

"The replacement word is 'very'," Thom tells me. I can't help laughing.

"It's the best option, really," he explains, putting paid to my chortling with a very level-headed examination of the choices that were available. "The alternative

was putting in a bleep, and that was never going to work. At least 'very' sounds sarcastic. I can sing that without feeling a twat."

But you've compromised the song!

"Oh yeah, of course we have. We know we have. And it's pretty obvious that we have — so anybody with any brains will realise that, see through it and go and buy the proper version."

**MARKETING MOVES** aside, the fact that Radiohead have barred themselves from the 3,000-sales-and-you're-a-star indie party by signing to EMI means that, as stunning as "Creep" sounds, it'll probably chart at about Number 74, hang around for a couple of weeks and fall back out again without so much as a whimper. The band seem surprisingly unconcerned.

"That'll probably happen," shrugs Ed, "but our day will come. It may take time but it will. For now, it's other people's loss."

"That song will always be there," Thom concludes. "And in five, six, ten years' time people will be saying that 'Creep' is a f—ing classic record. We know that."

Arrogant, articulate and extremely screwed up. How can Radiohead fail?



*Screwed-up moody boys come over all alien/ated in Oxford*